

# New Categorical Eligibility Policy:

## Enrolling ALL children in a household for free school meals



Dear School District:

**Nation-wide, an estimated 2.5 million children who could have been enrolled in free meals were missed last year.** However, a new federal policy on categorical eligibility offers an important opportunity for you to enroll more eligible children for free school meals.

Under the revised USDA policy, if **ANYONE** in a household receives benefits under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly the Food Stamp Program), the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) cash assistance program, or the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR), then **ALL children in the household are categorically eligible for free school meals.**

### Categorical Eligibility Policy: OLD vs. NEW

**OLD:** School districts had to match **EACH** child individually to a public benefits case record in order to certify them.

*Often resulted in matching problems due to spelling variations in a child's name, use of nicknames, or variations in the use of hyphenated names. Sometimes one child in a family was matched while others were not.*

**NEW:** If **ONE** student in the household is identified as participating in a public benefit program, then the school district must extend eligibility for free school meals to **ALL** children in the household even if there is not an exact record match for each child.

### Acceptable Forms of Documentation for Extending Eligibility:

- **SNAP, FDPIR, or TANF data**
- **School district records:** Enrollment records or records in point-of-sale software, for example.
- **School meals application:** An application with a case number for any household member is sufficient documentation to certify all children in the household as categorically eligible for free meals.
- **Information from school officials:** Information provided by a principal, teacher, or other school official is sufficient to certify all children in the household.
- **Parent attestation:** A signed statement or meal application that lists all members of the household.
- **Other documents:** School districts may use legal documents that are available to them, such as custody agreements.

### What this Means to Your District

You, as a school district, now have a responsibility to certify **ALL** children in a household for free meals if you have knowledge that at least **ONE** household member is a recipient of SNAP, TANF cash assistance, or FDPIR benefits.

### How to Implement the New Policy

1. **Revise your certification matching system** to ensure that, once a single child is matched, all children in the household are identified through your student database and certified.  
→ Search your student database to identify additional children in the households of individually matched children. Some student databases have a specific household indicator. For student databases that do not have such an indicator, the child's address could be used to identify additional children in the household.
2. **Use any records available to your district.** (examples on left)
3. **Use the Notice of Direct Certification form** (provided by OPI) to let families know that ALL children in their household are eligible when you use SNAP forms/reports as eligibility documentation .
4. **When extending eligibility** to additional children, **document** that the children are in the same household. (guidance on left)

**For further guidance on this policy, please contact OPI School Nutrition Programs at 1-888-231-9393 or locally at 406-444-2501.**



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